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HP is working with software makers to create bundles of their most popular small- and midsize-business applications preinstalled on HP systems, while IBM is bringing its Power 5 design to the SMB segment through its Express architecture.

Top-tier OEMs are looking to bundle hardware, software and services as a way of winning customers in the highly competitive and rapidly growing SMB space.

The result will be that users will get access to the latest technology packaged in a way that won't strain their tight budgets or small IT staffs.

At the TechXNY show here last week, Hewlett-Packard Co. officials outlined a plan to extend their 1-year-old Smart Office strategy. The Palo Alto, Calif., company will work with software makers to create bundles of their most popular small- and midsize-business applications preinstalled on HP systems and sold through resellers and systems integrators.

HP is extending its Partner Reach program with Microsoft Corp. through a channel education initiative. In addition, HP and SAP AG have pilot programs under way in eight countries where the companies' resellers are offering low-end HP ProLiant servers with SAP's Business One and MySAP All-in-One business software. Business One targets customers with 50 or fewer employees.

HP is entering a pilot test with a handful of resellers to offer Intuit Inc.'s QuickBooks accounting software on HP desktops and servers, officials said. HP is also bundling Avaya Inc.'s IP Office communications application with ProLiant servers. Distributors will integrate the technology, and resellers will bring it to SMB customers.

HP estimates that 90 percent of its $23 billion SMB business comes from the channel. "It's about helping out the channel go to places they can't go to today," said Nigel Ball, vice president of HP's SMB Solutions group.

HP's SMB customers say the company's focus on the channel is important to businesses that have limited resources and IT staffs and thus depend on systems integrators and resellers to answer myriad IT questions.

"I'm a one-man IT shop," said Todd Zantow, network administrator for Prairie Clinic, a hospital in Sauk City, Wis. "I try to be proficient in all areas, but I know I can't be an expert in all areas. So I need to know I have someone I can call and get some answers."

For its part, IBM is bringing its Power 5 design to the SMB segment through its Express architecture, which is intended to enable users to easily order, configure and install the systems.

The company last week rolled out the two-way p5 520 and four-way p5 550 Express servers, which are installed with the AIX operating system and integrated with IBM storage and middleware, according to officials. There is also an optional virtualization feature

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